

House Conservation, Forestry, and Outdoor Recreation Committee
Hearing on HB 4694
September 22, 2005
Testimony of Nancy O'Brien, Asset Manager, MSHDA

Good morning. I'd like to thank Chairman Casperson and the members of this committee for permitting me the opportunity to testify on behalf of House Bill 4694.

My name is Nancy O'Brien. I have worked for the last 20 years for the Michigan State Housing Development Authority as an asset manager.

I am one of about 250 MSHDA staff members. Our agency oversees 470 low- and moderate-income apartment complexes throughout the state.

I am personally responsible for oversight of 28 of these housing developments. As a part of my job, I am required to inspect all of them at least once a year, and more often if needed to monitor their upkeep and operations to make certain the interests of Michigan taxpayers are protected. More than 100 people who work for MSHDA travel to MSHDA-financed developments as part of their jobs.

It should come as no surprise that the majority of low-income housing developments are in financially distressed and, often, high-crime, areas.

Although, I have never felt threatened while physically on the grounds of a MSHDA-financed property, traveling to and from them is another matter.

I frequently drive for miles down surface streets dotted with boarded up, burned out, or gated buildings, vacant lots, overgrown vegetation, vagrants, and unruly young people. I'm reluctant to slow down to less than 25 miles per hour but it seems as if there's a stoplight every few blocks. Due to construction I have sometimes found myself routed off closed freeways into neighborhoods I don't know – and with no idea how to reach my original destination or get back to my office on West Grand Blvd.

I put over 20,000 miles per year on my car, the majority of those job related. I have on more than one occasion developed car trouble on the highway in the middle of nowhere. Even with a cell phone you're lucky if it only takes an hour for help to arrive, especially during inclement weather. During those times I have felt like a sitting duck for anyone with bad intentions.

Even traveling in more affluent neighborhoods is no guarantee of one's safety. I was once chased by three men in a van down I-96 in Livonia.

I was among those who actively worked for years to get our state to adopt "shall issue" legislation for a concealed carry permit.

I did so, not only because I believe, generally, that people have a right to have the means to defend themselves but also because in the course of my work there is a very real possibility that I might have a specific need to defend myself personally.

I was greatly relieved when this body found the wisdom back in 2000 to pass Public Act 381 into law. I immediately took the training to qualify for a concealed pistol permit.

Imagine my shock and dismay when – at a general staff meeting of my agency – we were informed in no uncertain terms that, in spite of the change in the law, MSHDA employees who had a carry permit were prohibited from using it in the course of fulfilling our potentially life-threatening duties.

I only learned of the hearing this morning less than a week ago. Since then I have been able to inform only a small fraction of my fellow employees at my agency. And in that short time I received four other, written statements of support for House Bill 4694.

I would like to read just one of these into the record.

During my employment with the Michigan State Housing Development Authority I have had two positions that required a great deal of travel all over the state. I've had to spend the night in motels...sometimes in cities that did not have the better known chains, just little mom and pop cabins. There were many nights spent sleepless because of being frightened over incidents involving "stalking" like behavior...men following me around town before nightfall--showing up at the same restaurant, bookstore, etc. Once someone tossed stones at the motel window, repeatedly, between 2 and 4 a.m.

Often, when receiving State Government Rates at motels, you are given rooms on far wings of the motel, less desirable areas.

Traveling with a firearm would certainly provide me with a more secure peace of mind than not. In my opinion, a woman should never be in a vehicle, alone, without a cell phone and firearm.

Please consider passing this bill.

Carol Simons
Asset Manager
Michigan State Housing Development Authority

Only a few days notice, and that is only one of five statements from MSHDA employees that will be provided to this committee.

And this is just one – small – state agency in which employees are required in the course of their employment to conduct on-site inspections.

At the end of fiscal year 2004, the state employed 54,573 people. Many of them are similarly required to go into potentially dangerous situations, including those who work for the departments of:

- Agriculture
- Civil Rights
- Community Health
- Family Independence Agency
- Labor and Economic Growth
- Environmental Quality
- Lottery
- Gaming Control Board
- Natural Resources
- Transportation
- Treasury

In fact, given the very nature of government and the services it provides, it's hard to think of a state agency that doesn't have employees who sometimes must be in potentially threatening situations.

I was thrilled in 2000 when our state government finally recognized that the people of a free country are entitled to carry the means to defend themselves. I was severely disappointed to then learn that the state would not extend this right to its own employees!

This legislation will not give state employees any privileges not already enjoyed by everyone else in Michigan. It will not grant any special exemptions from meeting all the same requirements as anyone else with carry permit. Thanks to the passage of Public Act 381 a few years ago, we already have the legal right to carry a weapon to defend ourselves. The only thing this bill will do is grant us permission to exercise that right in the very circumstances in which it is most desperately needed.

I urge you to support House Bill 4694.

Thank you.

M E M O R A N D U M

September 19, 2005

TO: The Michigan Legislature

FROM: Carol Simons
Asset Manager
Michigan State Housing Development Authority

RE: HB 4694

During my employment with the Michigan State Housing Development Authority I have had two positions that required a great deal of travel all over the state. I've had to spend the night in motels...sometimes in cities that did not have the better known chains, just little mom and pop cabins. There were many nights spent sleepless because of being frightened over incidents involving "stalking" like behavior...men following me around town before nightfall--showing up at the same restaurant, bookstore, etc. Once someone tossed stones at the motel window, repeatedly, between 2 and 4 a.m.

Often, when receiving State Government Rates at motels, you are given rooms on far wings of the motel, less desirable areas.

Traveling with a firearm would certainly provide me with a more secure peace of mind than not. In my opinion, a woman should never be in a vehicle, alone, without a cell phone and firearm.

Please consider passing this bill.

MEMORANDUM

September 19, 2005

TO: The Michigan Legislature

FROM: Larry Gilbert
Building Construction Specialist
Michigan State Housing Development Authority

RE: HB 4694

In many assignments as an Authority employee in the position of Building Construction Specialist, one is subjected to the responsibility of spending many hours, often times, in precarious situations while on construction sites throughout the State. Unfortunately, there are certain individuals who have a very negative opinion of State employees, no matter what the position an employee may hold. Although I personally have not had a "life threatening" experience, I have colleagues who have been placed in those types of circumstances. Acquaintances have been robbed and threatened on jobsites. One friend even had a vehicle stolen moments after arriving on a site, after which he highly recommended that I carry a gun for protection, whether approved by MSHDA or not. Although my position is not nearly as dangerous as many other State positions, there remain certain, high crime areas of the state where concern for safety is a very real issue. Certainly one would think that if we are expected to perform our duties in known areas that meet this description we should be allowed the option to carry protection, if one so chooses. House Bill 4694 would provide that choice, if one feels that protection is necessary. Certainly, anyone would, and should be first subjected to training and certification before carrying any kind of weapon, just as the current General CCW law requires. This is a reasonable bill to pass.

MEMORANDUM

September 20, 2005

TO: The Michigan Legislature

FROM: Richard Kroeg
Information Systems Analyst
Michigan, Department of Information Technology
And Certified NRA Personal Protection Instructor

RE: HB 4694

Dear Sirs,

Although I have not been in the field with the State Employees this bill would effect, I have had the privilege of working with these fine people for over twelve years. Through this time I have listened to first hand accounts of the types of locations they have had to visit. In many cases it is exactly these types of areas where the average citizen of Michigan who has a CCW would be expected to carry a firearm to protect themselves.

Not only have I learned of these potentially dangerous conditions from listening to first hand accounts; I have the unique perspective of being a certified instructor in the area of Personal Protection with the National Rifle Association. This course is recognized by the State of Michigan as part of the qualifications needed to obtain a CCW.

From what I know about HB4694, these state employees who choose to obtain a CCW will held to the same high standards and laws that all Michigan Citizens are.

State Employees provide a vital service and spend long hours helping the less fortunate of Michigan. I think it only right that these employees be allowed to same options as all Michigan Citizens have when it comes to personal protection.

O'Brien, Nancy (MSHDA)

From: Thompson, Bob (MSHDA)
Sent: Monday, September 19, 2005 5:50 PM
To: 'tomcasperson@house.mi.gov'
Subject: HB 4694 - CCW for State Employees

Dear Rep Casperson,

This bill is currently in your Committee on Conservation, Forestry and Outdoor Recreation. I urge your support for this bill. It will allow individuals employed by the state to carry a concealed pistol while traveling in the course of business. It does not change the current requirement of state employees to not carry a concealed weapon in state owned buildings.

It will allow state employees the same right, benefit and protection as all other residents of our state, to 'carry' in compliance with all other laws, on private property during the course of business.

Please support this legislation as it makes it's way through your Committee.

Thank you!

Bob Thompson
2080 Noble Rd.
Williamston, MI. 48895
thompsonro@michigan.gov Office
bobl20@peoplepc.com Home